

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AUTONOMOUS ONLINE LEARNING TO ENHANCE ACADEMIC WRITING COMPETENCE DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract: Autonomous learning during covid-19 pandemic situation becomes the best strategy to perform an effective learning process. Particularly, autonomous learning in academic writing course requires great deals of students' willingness to manage their time and ability. This study is a content analysis which aimed at analyzing the implementation of autonomous learning strategy. Descriptive qualitative method was used to investigate and describe how 20 higher education students managed their time and ability as well as to find out the obstacles. In collecting data, questionnaire and interview were used and they were analyzed using the original theory from Miles & Huberman's (1994). The result showed that the students had implemented autonomous learning in various ways. They practiced writing independently by completing the tasks and assignments given by the lecturer. Some of them used their spare time to do independent learning outside the classroom. They also used internet to find sources such as online translator, education websites, and videos on YouTube. Some obstacles were occurred due to some reasons; such as; 1) poor internet connection, 2) lack of competence in understanding academic writing materials through online learning which needs more effort such as creating group discussion among classmates, 3) weakness in building keywords when they tried to search terms used in Academic Writing course. Therefore, in having academic writing lessons, they prefer to accomplish it offline in order to get good comprehension since they realized that academic writing is important subject for their bachelor journey.

Keywords: Autonomous learning; online learning; academic writing; covid-19 pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Among the other three skills in learning English, writing is the most difficult skill to learn and implement since it requires productive skill which is to find the ideas then deliver them to the written output (Irawati, 2015). Writing, based on (Zuhri Dj & Sukarnianti, 2015), is an effective way to communicate and express our thoughts, feelings, and opinions to others. Further, academic writing means the kind of writing that becomes course of learning in the high school and college classes (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). It is different from personal writing or creative writing because academic writing is significantly more formal. In this context, academic writing is one of the courses in learning English at higher education level which is very crucial as the output to achieve the bachelor degree.

Though, the urgency of the academic writing skill is not as crucial as what is happening in the university environment and the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak made it worst. The government ruled social distancing policies. It is required many educational institutions to

carry out the learning activities from home. Due to the conditions, the use of the online learning method is massively recommended by the researchers and the teachers. The best strategy of learning in the Covid-19 pandemic which performs online method is called autonomous learning. It requires students' willingness to manage their time and ability going through the online classroom.

Autonomous learning also has been the subject discussed by the expert of education in literature in a few decades. It can be portrayed as an ability to assume responsibility for, or command over your own learning (Benson, 2001). It means students take responsibility for having the ability to determine what subject and content they want to learn and the appropriate methods for them to learn the languages. In sum, the aspects that involve in autonomous learning are ability and willingness. Students must control their ability to learn and manage their time; moreover, students must be willing to learn independently.

(Lamb, 2004) carried out some varieties of autonomous learning; autonomous in classroom language learning and autonomous out-of-class language learning. Out-of-class learning refers to students' efforts in taking classroom-based language classes to discover an occasion for language learning and utilize it outside the classroom. The researchers assumed that distance language learning using cyberspace is one of the out-of-class learning. Students and teachers are not in conventional classroom, they are in different places but still doing the courses through online platforms.

Internet provides several platforms that can be utilized in the learning process such as; Online Chat room, Video Conferences, and Websites. Nowadays, the advance of creating an innovative and effective online learning platform is way more urgently required to boost the outcome of teaching learning (Suwandi et al., 2021) In the modern era, the role of new technology gives many contributions to the learning process (Fibriana et al., 2021). Online platforms have supported the distance communication activities, therefore the way personal communicate using online platforms allows second language teachers to construct the ideal online courses that are more interactive, contextual, and authentic than the traditional learning process. According to Ko & Rossen (2017), in online learning, the teacher also prepared the course based on the syllables. It means the teachers must find the right way to guide the students and provide the learning material through online platforms, not only attach tasks that perform online such as ask the students to browse the online material or connecting to large different sites. Teachers must be able to present the material in the several applications used in the Online learning. Online Learning is regularly conveyed utilizing specific programming that helps teachers to make their courses and student in utilizing coursework (Nycz & Cohen,

2007).

The researchers found some studies which were previously conducted some research related to autonomous learning. A study was written by (Ahmad & Razeq, 2016) which investigated the readiness of university students for autonomous learning of English as a foreign language. The results suggested that as a result of previous educational experiences, the learners were habituated by their past educational experiences to place the responsibility for the success or failure of their language acquisition on their teachers. Another study investigated the affordances for autonomous learning in a fully online learning environment involving the implementation of task-based instruction in conjunction with Web 2.0 technologies (Lee, 2016). The difference of the current study from the previous ones is that it focused on not only autonomous online learning in academic writing but also knowing the obstacles faced by students in doing the online learning relating to academic writing.

Considering the background of the study, the researchers was eager to find out how EFL students manage their time and ability in comprehending the learning material through online learning in academic writing. Therefore, the study aimed at investigating the implementation of autonomous learning strategy in EFL students within how they are managing their time and ability in comprehending the learning material through online academic writing as well as to find out the obstacles of EFL students in using the online learning as the media in academic writing.

METHOD

According to Moleong (2017), descriptive qualitative research is a research in the form of words or study framework as the final output and carried out by understanding phenomena that occur in the research subject. Creswell & Creswell (2018) also stated that qualitative method depends on text and picture information, have remarkable strides in information investigation, and draw on the assorted design. The study employed descriptive qualitative method to investigate and describe the practice of autonomous online learning in academic writing and explain the result of how are the students implement the autonomous learning based on their time and ability management, also the obstacles faced by the fifth-semester students of the English Study Program of *Universitas PGRI Semarang* in practicing the autonomous online learning. The participants that were investigated in this research were 20 students which was taken by purposive random sampling technique from the total population of 140 students. Those are the students who had been thought academic writing through online course.

In this study, the data were collected through questionnaire and interview. According to Nugroho (2018), the term questionnaire refers either to the questionnaire that is filled out by the survey participants themselves or refers to the survey instruments that are managed by the interviewer through face-to-face or by telephone. Sugiyono (2018) also said that questionnaire is an information assortment procedure performed by giving a pack of inquiries or written statements to the respondents to reply. Therefore, the researchers gave the open-ended questionnaire consisting of thirteen questions to get deeper information which were distributed through Google Form. Interview as the second instrument is required to re-enforce the data. The researchers used a semi-structured interview to collect the data. According to Draganova (2015), at the foundation of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived insight of others and the signification they make of that experience. Due to the pandemic, the interview was led via telephone and taking notes was done by the researchers throughout the interview.

After the data were collected, then were analyzed using theory of Mile & Huberman's (1994), those are data reduction, data display, drawing conclusion or verification. These components must be bounded and cannot be inseparable.

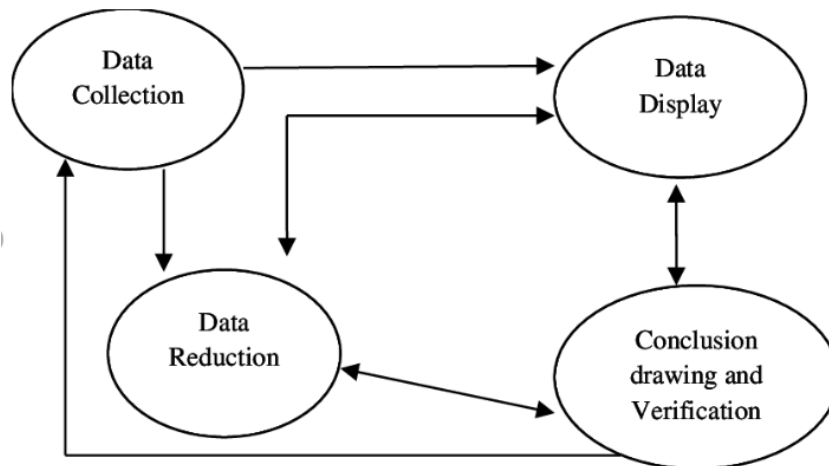


Figure 1. Steps in analyzing data on students' autonomous online learning (Miles & Huberman's 1994)

According to (Miles & Huberman's 1994) data reduction can be defined as the process of determination, disentanglement, and transformation of the data to field notes. The researchers focused on the points of the questions at the questionnaires in this step, the data that were not related to the purpose of the research investigation were decreased. The focus of the research is on the autonomous online learning in academic writing and the obstacles that face by the students.

Data display is a set of data that has been grouped and arranged sourced on data reduction which leads to a conclusion (Mile & Huberman's, 1994). In this level, the researchers introduced the result of analyzing the data collection. The questionnaire and interview result will be displayed as a narrative text. The last is concluding. It involved the result of the research that describes students' autonomous online learning in academic writing at *Universitas PGRI Semarang*.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the research were obtained using questionnaire and interview as the instruments of the data collection. The questionnaire consisted of 13 open-ended questions and 10 items of interview guideline were accomplished to help the researchers finding out the objectives of the research including; 1) the time management, 2) the implementation, and 3) the obstacles.

The first finding was about time management of the participants in doing autonomous learning in online academic writing. The findings were collected from the questionnaire items 1-4 and interview guideline which asking about how the participants manage their time during the online learning process and after the classroom dismissed. The findings of the item number 1 "How do the students manage their time between learning in the classroom and learning outside the classroom when participating Academic writing course is?", the researchers found that all of the participants have their own way of learning both in the classroom or outside the classroom. Basically, 13 out of 20 participants used their spare time to have autonomous learning outside the classroom. Moreover, the interview results showed in detail that 4 of the participants made a learning schedule or to do list about activities that should be done after the online learning was dismissed. It can be activities to accomplish assignments or prepare the coming online learning session.

The findings found from questionnaire item number 2 and interview guideline stated "Do the students learn only with their lecturer in the classroom or they were study independently outside the classroom?". 5 participants responded that they created group discussion with their friends using WAG (WhatsApp Group), while 10 of them learned by themselves using some sources such as YouTube videos, online application, PDF books, or websites. 5 other participants conveyed that they only studied from what they got from their lecturer such as PPT and e-books with no reasons. They only said "that is enough" without giving specific reason.

The findings obtained from item number 3 was about "Do the students learn independently after the classroom dismissed?". 12 of the participants had motivation to

understand the academic writing material more so they learned outside the classroom by themselves when they need to, while 8 of them do not have motivation to learn by themselves outside after the classroom dismissed. When these 8 participants were asking about the reasons why, they replied they cannot catch what was delivered by the lecturer because of the situation when the online learning running was noisy and it makes their focus distracted, in consequences, they could not understand the materials delivered by the lecturer. That is why they stuck with the online classroom without able to proceed the learning after the classroom was dismissed.

The findings of item number 4 stated “Do the students learn independently outside the classroom?”. The responses of item number 4 showed that 14 out of 20 participants learned independently in their spare time to make sure that they would be able to understand the material. However, 6 of the students cannot learn independently due to some reasons; 2 of them stated that they could not comprehend the materials well when learn independently, while 2 of them were lazy to learn independently outside the classroom, and the other 2 participants did not have motivation to do that.

The result of interview showed that students were well-educated about the concept of autonomous learning and have implemented the autonomous learning strategy in online academic writing. Each student has their own way to manage their time when performing autonomous learning in online academic writing. All of the participants used their spare time to obtain better understanding during the online classroom by practicing writing through online task given by the lecturer. The documents can be academic writing tasks in the form PDF file which they downloaded from online sources. Furthermore, the participants found the other materials and learned through online sources or YouTube videos outside the online classroom. They also explained that by doing that they can get the advantages of implementing autonomous learning in Academic Writing for their development of their writing skill. It supports them to understand better in the classroom.

The second finding was about the implementation of autonomous learning in online academic writing which were collected from the questionnaire items 5-9 and interview guideline. Item number 5 stated whether “The participants preferred to choose learning Academic Writing through online or offline in the classroom?”. The researchers found out that 15 participants preferred to learn academic writing offline in the classroom. According to the findings, offline learning made them focus and understand well to what the lecturer explained. Furthermore, they thought academic writing need deeper practices and corrections. Another issue was raised that the lecturer was rarely giving feedback of their tasks during online

learning. Meanwhile, 3 of them were fine with both online or offline learning, and 2 of them chose online learning because they thought it was more efficient and understandable.

The findings of item number 6 stated whether “The students browse the internet to study independently and have further study or not?”. 16 out of 20 participants answered “yes” for the question, which means they used internet to study independently and 4 of them did not do surfing independently through internet.

The item number 7 was related to the previous number, it stated that “What kind of online resources that the students used to support their study?”. 13 of the participants used online sources to support their study. They used dictionary such as; Google translate, U-dictionary, Mariam Webster dictionary, Cambridge dictionary, and Oxford dictionary to find difficult words when they were practice to write or explore the new vocabulary. They were also browsing material through education websites such as; Academia.edu, Brainly, Scribd, and *Ruang Guru*. They were also watching videos on YouTube to get better understanding about academic writing.

Item number 8 stated that “What websites as references the students usually visit or use to support their study toward the course?”. 14 participants mentioned the English education websites that gave them learning material or only information about academic writing like Scribd, Wikipedia, Academia, *Ruang Guru*, Brainly, and Quora. Further, 4 of them mentioned some translator websites like Google translate, U-dictionary, Cambridge dictionary, and Oxford dictionary. Also, the other 2 participants visited websites as their references randomly.

The findings obtained from item number 9 stated that “What the students’ motivation to learn without the presence of their lecturer in academic writing course?”. The responses showed that students got motivation to learn academic writing by themselves because they wanted to understand the material more deeply. They thought that writing is important skill for their future. They also wanted to get high score and compete with their friends, which means they wanted to understand more like their friends did.

In attempt to support the findings, the researchers desired to describe the interview result which showed that most of the participants had applied autonomous learning strategy in their online academic writing. They have different way to implement autonomous learning. Most of them used online sources to support their understanding such as online dictionaries, education websites, and learning videos. When they had difficult to understand even after they found other online sources they will make group discussion through online chat-room.

The third finding was about the obstacles faced by the participants when they

implement autonomous learning in online academic writing which were collected from the questionnaire items 10-13 and interview guideline. The findings of item number 10 stated that “The students understand the content of academic writing given by lecturer through online platforms such as video conferences, online chat-room, email, etc or not?”. Based on the students’ responses, their understanding about the content of academic writing through the mentioned online platforms depended on how the lecturer’s explanation whether it was clear enough to listen, did the duration of the online platforms space was enough or not, did the connection or network was good enough to join the online learning. However, 17 participants had difficulty in understanding the academic writing content given by the lecturer through online learning.

The finding obtained from item number 11 stated that “What the students’ obstacle when studying academic writing through online classroom?”. All of the participants gave information that they had difficulties to understand the academic writing learning material given through online. 10 of them declared that the problems occurred such as the unstable network, connection, or signal that made the lecturer explanation were truncated and got lost. Meanwhile, 7 participants got misunderstanding with the explanation from the lecturer or they just did not understand the content. The other 3 participants got difficulty to practice and understand the material due to lack of grammar, vocabularies, and word structures.

The findings of item number 12 stated about “The students’ experience relating to problems they faced during studying academic writing through online classroom?”. 17 of the participants faced the experiences of when they tried to figure out difficult topics delivered by their lecturer via online and tried to find the answer from online resources but they still did not get the answer. It was because of they had difficulty to find the keywords to find the material, while 3 of them were able to find easily what material they needed through some online sources that was helpful for them or they asked their friends and had discussion together.

The findings of item number 13 stated that “How students solve the problems when it was difficult to understand academic writing materials?”. 12 participants answered that they made a group discussion to solve the difficult topics, they had different thought and build conclusion in the online discussion group. Meanwhile, 6 of them tried to find the answer through various online sources or websites, and 2 of them asked the lecturer directly or when they had a chance in the next meeting.

The findings were also supported by the interview findings which showed that students faced some obstacles during autonomous online academic writing. All of them answered that poor of internet connection in the middle of online classroom was a huge problem. Particularly,

when the situation came in the moment of the lecturer explained theories. They said that it was annoying. Besides, students who were lack of vocabularies had difficulty to raise their ideas up when practices writing activities. They got stuck in the process of writing from the early steps to the final steps.

CONCLUSION

The current study was aimed at investigating the implementation of autonomous learning strategy in EFL students within how they are managing their time and ability in comprehending the learning material through online academic writing as well as to find out the obstacles of EFL students in using the online learning as the media in academic writing. The findings showed that the students were able to manage their time by making daily schedules of their learning includes their assignments lists. They were also practicing by doing the assignments at the lecture day. The students learned independently after the lecturer explained the material in order to understand the material using their own ways, and they also used their spare time to do independent learning outside the classroom.

Students had implemented autonomous learning in various ways. They practiced writing independently by completing the tasks and assignments given by the lecturer. Other than that, they were repeating materials in PDF file from the lecturer or browsing internet in order to find some valuable sources for their learning. They learned by reading a story line to inspire them into how to write well, students also practice to write in a notebook or take the assignments. They were also used internet to find sources such as online translator, education websites, and explanation via videos on YouTube.

Students faced some obstacles in implementing autonomous online learning. All of the participants had difficulty to do the online learning activities due to some reasons; 1) poor internet connection, 2) lack of competence in understanding academic writing materials through online learning which needs more effort such as creating group discussion among classmates, 3) weakness in building keywords when they tried to search terms used in academic writing course. Therefore, in having academic writing lessons, they prefer to accomplish it offline in order to get good comprehension since they realized that academic writing is important subject for their bachelor journey.

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